the North-Eastern Region some time back, the Ministers and the Members (Traffic) Railway Board, has assured that the Barak Express and Cachar Express would be linked with Guwahati Express, so as to avoid inconvenience of mid-journey transhipment;

(b) if so, whether the said proposal has since been implemented, if not, the reasons therefor; and

(c) by when it is likely to be implemented?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF RAILWAYS (SHRI O. RAJAGOPAL): (a) In the meeting with the Members of Parliament from the North-Eastern region, assurance regarding augmentation of 5811/5812 Lumding-Silchar Barak Valley Express and 5801/5802 Lumding-SilcharCachar Express and that regarding connection for Guwahati, at Lumding, with Cachar and Barak Valley Expresses were made.

(b) and (c) Yes, Sir. The timings of 5802 Silchar-Lumding Cachar Express have been changed w.e.f. 01.01.2002 to provide connection to 4055 Guwahati-Delhi Brahmaputra Mail and 5930 Dibrugarh Town-Chennai Egmore Express, at Lumding. 5812 Barak Valley Express is already providing connection to 5666 Dimapur-Guwahati Express at Lumding. However, mid-journey transhipment is unavoidable due to change of gauge at Lumding.

Prohibition on smoking in South Central Railway

290. SHRI C. RAMACHANDRAIAH:

DR. C. NARAYANA REDDY:

Will the Minister of RAILWAYS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that the South Central Railway has issued orders prohibiting smoking at Railway premises;

(b) what is the definition given to the term premises; and

(c) what is the implementing agency?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF RAILWAYS (SHRI O. RAJAGOPAL): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) The premises include the headquarters of the Railways, all office buildings of the railways, railway stations, railway platforms and other premises where there are railway establishments.

(c) These provisions shall be implemented through the local law enforcing agencies and courts.

Creation of new railway zones and divisions

291. SHRI C. RAMACHANDRAIAH: Will the Minister of RAIL WAYS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that Government had taken a decision to create new Railway Zones and Divisions in the country;

(b) if so, when was the decision taken and what were the zones and divisions the Ministry wanted to create;

(c) what is the progress in the direction,what are physical, financial targets achieved, so far; and

(d) by when would these zones and divisions become fully operational?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF RAILWAYS (SHRI O. RAJAGOPAL): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) The proposal to create six new railway zones with headquarters at Allahabad, Bhubaneswar, Bangalore (now Hubli), Hajipur, Jaipur and Jabalpur was approved by the Cabinet in 1996. Another new zone at Bilaspur was approved by the Cabinet in 1998. The Government's decision to set up eight new divisions with headquarters at Agra, Ahmedabad, Guntur, Pune, Ranchi, Rangiya, Raipur and Singrauli was announced in the Parliament in 1995 while placing the supplementary demands for grants for the 1995-96 budget.

(c) and (d) An Officer-on-Special Duty with skeleton stafThas been posted for setting up of each of the new Zones and Divisions. Some work related to acquisition of land, development of office and residential complex has been undertaken. An expenditure of Rs. 49.12 crores has been incurred on new Zones and Rs. 14.64 crores on new Divisions upto 31.3.2001. One/two Divisions have been attached to each Zone to oversee certain specific part activities. However, owing to the severe resource crunch now being faced by the Railways, the proposed new Zones and Divisions will only gradually become operational depending upon the availability of investible resources. It is not possible to indicate any time frame for this at this juncture.